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ARTICLES:

- (1) What lies behind the clouds over Japan-US relations: Iraq, comfort women issue require more level-headed players

SANKEI (Page 13) (Abridged)
April 19, 2007

By Tadae Takubo, visiting professor at Kyorin University

What happens if US troops leave Iraq?

It is still fresh in our memory that Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao highhandedly broached historical issues in his meeting with Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit held in Vientiane in November 2004. Japanese people also still remember Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing's thunderous look before television cameras during massive anti-Japan demonstrations in China in 2005. Demons can sometimes behave like angels. During their recent visits to Japan, Wen and Li presented themselves as likable Chinese leaders, wearing smiles all the time. Japan welcomed them with open arms. I have no intention of discussing the appropriateness of this sort of reaction to the Chinese leaders in this paper. What truly worries me is the fact that dark clouds are beginning to hang over Japan-US relations, which must be rock solid in dealing with China.

First, one cause lies in Japan's frivolous attitude of having gone along with the Bush administration on the Iraq war without bothering to determine its essence. Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) President Ichiro Ozawa described the Bush administration's actions as "egoistic" and urged Tokyo to make a decision not to follow the United States. Defense Minister Fumio Kyuma also said twice that the Bush administration's decision to launch the Iraq war was a "mistake." Those thoughtless remarks are seemingly attributable to calls for withdrawal from Iraq rising in the US from the Democrats, who won the midterm elections last November.

I have three questions for the lawmakers: (1) Is the Iraq "war" a war between states? (2) Who is fighting for what? (3) What will happen if the US troops abruptly withdraw from Iraq? Because this is not a war under international law, there cannot be negotiations for a ceasefire. Sooner or later, the US will withdraw from Iraq. But

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before doing so, the Iraqi government must become able to defend itself. The war on international terrorism will continue even after the US troops leave Iraq. The war on terrorism is not going to end with the Democratic Party in charge of the US government. The United States is fighting back some Islamic fundamentalists who are challenging democracy. A steep rise in oil prices would not be the only consequence of turbulence in the Middle East resulting from a Kurdish attempt for independence in a civil war after America's departure. The defense minister is not the only one who offers his view like an umpire in defiance of the country's dangerous position.

Japan-US crisis and Japan and US experts

The second cause is Japan's inept response to the so-called comfort women resolution presented to the US Congress by Representative Michael Honda and others. At issue is whether or not the former Imperial Japanese Army used coercion in recruiting the comfort women. The absence of coercion would mean that the Japanese military had bordellos just like the militaries of other countries. The Honda resolution relies on the Kono Statement that simply complied with Seoul's request for acknowledging the use of coercion for the honor of the former South Korean comfort women. Prime Minister Abe's remarks intended to correctly clarify the background of the comfort women issue by explaining the word "coercion" from both the broad and narrow senses were twisted and drew flak from the US media. The US media reaction was unfair.

Every time tensions have grown between Japan and the United States, the automatic self-correcting mechanism worked properly with US experts in Japan persuading Tokyo not to go overboard and Japan experts in the US checking Washington's mistakes. For instance, a movement spread in the US in 2001 to expand the scope of compensation for wartime Nazi slave laborers to include those worked for Japanese companies. Then Secretary of State Colin Powell opposed it, and three former US ambassadors to Japan, including Walter Mondale, issued a statement critical of the US Congress. I was so impressed that I contributed to this column an article praising their action as mirroring American conscience.

Japan bashing by China, South Korea, and the US

This time, no one but Daniel Inoue raised objections to the Honda resolution. Even US Ambassador to Japan Thomas Schieffer joined the Japan bashing by saying: "It would have a destructive impact if the American people took it that Japan was backing away from the Kono Statement." It is also absurd for China, South Korea, and the United States to try to squash Japan's view, which is just. Many people believing in the Japan-US alliance hold correct views.

During his stay in Japan, Wen delivered a speech at the Diet, giving a positive evaluation to Japan's sincere apologies and remorse over historical events and urging Tokyo to match them with action. His speech elicited huge applause from the audience. Many ruling and opposition leaders also made courtesy calls on Wen at his Tokyo hotel - something that has never taken place during visits to Japan by President George W. Bush. China's "magical" diplomacy was utterly amazing. Japan-US relations are far more mature than Japan-China relations, but that warrants no optimism.

(2) "Comfort women" issue by Yoshiaki Yoshimi: Need to disseminate clear message showing that Japan has overcome the past

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AKAHATA (Page 15) (Full)
April 19, 2007

Yoshiaki Yoshimi, professor of modern Japanese history at Chuo University

Prime Minister Abe's response to a US House resolution on "wartime comfort women" is sending out ripples. His response was that there was no "coercion in the narrow sense," and that he had no intention to offer apologies. Afterwards, however, Abe came under strong fire from abroad, so he said he stands by a government statement issued in 1993 by then Chief Cabinet Secretary Kono (commonly called the Kono Statement), but he has not taken back his previous response on "coercion."

Well, how about historical facts?

It is strange in the first place to draw a line between the term "taking away" (renko) and the term "work or employment" (shieki) and take issue only with the former. Whatever the forms of "taking away" were, the question is whether women were forced to work at comfort stations.

The point at issue is not limited to abductions by using violence or intimidation. Even under the law at the time, if someone takes someone out of the country by force or intimidation and detains that person, this act constitutes human trafficking and the act of taking someone to elsewhere by cajolery or allurement. Specifically, these acts correspond to "abduction and transfer from the country", "human trafficking", and "abduction, kidnapping and transfer from the country."

It is also impossible to say that the government would not be responsible if the rank and file of either the military or the police authorities were not involved directly. That is because the former Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) created, managed, and expanded the wartime comfort women system. In Korea and Taiwan, Japanese military police and police told brokers to recruit women and put those brokers under their control.

The leading role in the system was played by the military, not by brokers. Proof of this is official military documentation that has already been disclosed. If the recruitment of women and management of comfort stations were entrusted to brokers, the military and brokers were equally guilty because the military did not put an end to the detention of women.

Much more serious a problem than that is that the wartime comfort women system was essentially sexual slavery -- exclusively for military use. Most women were detained in comfort facilities as a result of human trafficking or after being kidnapped or abducted. They had no freedom to refuse to provide sexual service or to go out

or to retire. All these things have been proved by not only victims' testimony but also a number of military files and records and soldiers' memoirs.

Abductions by the military or military police, in other words, cases coming under the so-called "coercion in the narrow sense," cannot be rejected, either. Even a Japanese court has acknowledged that Japanese military personnel abducted women by force in China's Shanxi Province. Many testimonies by Philippine women indicated the same. A 1994 research report by the Dutch government recorded that there were eight cases of this kind, including not only the Semarang

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Comfort Station incident but also failed attempts to abduct. There is also documentary evidence of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (Tokyo Trial) and soldiers' memoirs.

In conclusion, it is impermissible to back away even a single step from the Kono Statement. But the Kono Statement is not necessarily perfect, because although it admitted it "severely injured the honor and dignity of many women," it employed the phrase "with the involvement of the military authorities" to make it ambiguous as to who injured the honor and dignity of many women. It is also a problem that the statement does not admit legal responsibility.

Overseas media have severely taken issue with the gap in Abe's attitude between the abduction issue caused by North Korea and the "comfort women" issue, as he is eager to resolve the former but less eager to deal with the latter. Both issues are important human rights issues and remain pending. If the Japanese government clearly acknowledges its responsibility for the "comfort women" issue and compensates each victim, that will be a big contribution to human rights issues. It will also enhance Japan's prestige and undergird Japan's position on the abduction issue.

Japan should not escape into the Kono Statement as a makeshift measure. Rather, it should reform itself into a country that can send a clear message for the future by showing that Japan has overcome the past and is contributing to preventing a recurrence of wartime violence.

(3) North Korea fails to implement six-party agreement; Pyongyang eyes change to America's "hostile policy"; Pyongyang unlikely to abandon nuclear programs until ceasefire agreement is replaced with peace treaty

YOMIURI (Page 15) (Abridged)
April 18, 2007

The six-party talks held on February 13 adopted an agreement obligating North Korea to shut down its Yongbyon nuclear facilities and accept IAEA inspectors within 60 days as its initial steps.

Conditioning its work to shut down the nuclear plant on Washington's move to fully unfreeze North Korean accounts at Banco Delta Asia (BDA), Pyongyang missed the February 14 deadline.

Amid growing skepticism about Pyongyang's commitment to the six-party agreement, an American delegation led by New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson visited Pyongyang on April 8-11. Arriving in Seoul on his way back to the US, Richardson indicated that he has sensed Pyongyang's intention to implement its initial steps.

Once the funds at BDA are withdrawn, North Korea is certain to shut down its Yongbyon nuclear complex.

Then, what was the purpose of the North's adherence to its BDA accounts that hold only 25 million dollars?

The answer lies in North Korea's assertions and moves since last spring. Simply put, Pyongyang used its BDA funds in a bid to bring changes to America's hostile policy toward North Korea. The North's standpoint is that the July 1953 ceasefire agreement of the Korean War should be swiftly replaced with a permanent peace treaty.

Starting last spring, North Korea pressed the US behind the scenes

for a shift from the ceasefire agreement to a peace treaty. Washington's rejection resulted in missile launches in July and a nuclear test in October by North Korea. Following US-ROK joint military exercises, the Panmunjom mission of the Korean People's Army released a statement on Aug. 22 noting: "We consider that the US has declared the ceasefire agreement as invalid."

Pyongyang's view is that as long as the US sticks to its hostile policy toward the North that threatens the security of the region, it will not abandon a nuclear deterrent, and that once the US has adopted policy of coexistence in place of hostile policy, it is ready to dismantle its nuclear programs.

Although this logic is self-centered, in dealing with North Korea, which is extremely cunning, it is essential to be aware of Pyongyang's way of thinking.

What will happen to the six-party talks in the future? Based on the February agreement, working groups have been established on five themes: (1) the nuclear issue, (2) economic aid, (3) improving US-DPRK relations, (4) normalizing Japan-DPRK relations, and (5) regional security. Groups for (3) and (5) are expected to function actively. North Korea has a particularly strong interest in group (5), which will handle a peace treaty.

China, as the chair of the six-party talks, are lobbying other member countries to hold a foreign ministerial once the North shuts down the Yongbyon plant and accepts IAEA inspectors, as promised. Chances are also high for the US, China, and North Korea - the signatory countries of the ceasefire -- plus South Korea to hold talks on a peace treaty. But there is a long way to go before the North relinquishes its nuclear programs if it taps into a peace treaty after taking the initial steps. Japan would be less represented in the process.

(4) People who can't recognize North Korea threat

NIHON KEIZAI (Page 2) (Full)
April 16, 2007

Hisayoshi Ina, senior writer

In my last column "Thinking from Vientiane," I wrote that the present-day situation-in which Japan is facing North Korea's nuclear and missile threats-is akin to the Cuban Missile Crisis the United States experienced in 1962. I thought this sense could be shared by people living on the Japanese archipelago. But it does not seem like that.

Last month, there was a Japan-US security seminar in San Francisco. In the seminar, I said the current state of Japan was like that crisis. This view encountered a counterargument on the spot from Hajime Izumi, a professor at the University of Shizuoka. I have his consent to introduce his view in this column. Mr. Izumi said, "Japanese people do not think so seriously about North Korea's nuclear development."

Americans there also looked surprised. They said the United States-with its expanded deterrent strategy clearly shown to North Korea-would defend Japan. That is premised on North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons. This point is a problem for Japan. However, they consider North Korea's nuclear arsenal as a threat. In this respect, their perception decisively differs from Mr. Izumi's.

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Figures shown in press polls indicate the Japanese public's sense of menace.

According to the Asahi Shimbun of Oct. 11, 2006, those feeling a threat from North Korea totaled over 80% -broken down into 44%

"feeling a very strong threat" and 38% "feeling a threat to a certain extent." Those who "don't feel one very much" accounted for 13%, and the proportion of those who "don't feel one at all" was 4%.

Around the same time, CNN also conducted a public opinion survey in the United States. In that CNN poll, 20% considered North Korea as an imminent threat, according to the Asahi Shimbun of Oct. 18, 2006. These figures came right after North Korea's nuclear test. Yet, there has been a similar trend.

According to the Yomiuri Shimbun of Dec. 16, 2006, 40% in Japan answered that the international community should overthrow the Kim Jong Il regime in order to have North Korea abandon its nuclear arsenal. Among other answers in Japan, 33% opted for the six-party talks, with 13% choosing to toughen sanctions and 6% suggesting the need for the United States and North Korea to hold bilateral dialogue. In the United States, 50% favored the six-party talks, with 23% insisting on the necessity of stepping up sanctions and 7% calling for bilateral dialogues between the United States and North Korea. The option of "overthrowing the Kim Jong Il regime"-which topped all other answers in Japan-accounted for 6% in the United States.

In addition, the Japanese public took a severe view of the six-party talks held in February. According to the Mainichi Shimbun of Feb. 27, 2007, 63% did not appreciate the six-party talks while 31% did. As seen from these figures, negative answers were over twofold. The six-party talks reached an agreement. Asked about this, 15% thought North Korea would give up its nuclear arsenal in line with that six-party agreement, while 78% did not.

As well as Mr. Izumi, academics studying regional affairs are prone in their sensitivities to feel like people living in regions they study. Mr. Don Oberdorfer, who once served as chief of the Tokyo bureau of the Washington Post and is a most respected foreign affairs journalist in the United States, is now pursuing his study of the Korean Peninsula at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

Writing for the March 14 electronic version of Newsweek for South Korea, Oberdorfer analyzed why the United States has switched its North Korea policy. The first reason he cited was North Korea's nuclear test. He underscored the start of dialogue over the deepening threat. This overlaps with North Korea's logic of seeing its nuclear test as a political success. Even Oberdorfer agrees.

Mr. Han Sung Joo, a former South Korean foreign minister, spoke at George Washington University. I had a chance to hear his speech there, and he was clear-cut in what he said there. Han, who is a scholar of political science, noted that the pattern of a Japan-US coalition vs. South Korea in the six-party talks has changed to the pattern of a South Korea-US coalition vs. Japan. He also ascribed this changeover to the "strategic decision" of the United States and also to the Sunshine Policy (of South Korea) toward North Korea. It was a "second Nixon shock" to Japan, he said.

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The six-party agreement of Feb. 13 set a 60-day time limit for first steps. When calculated normally, April 14 is the day time is up. Has North Korea delivered on its promise to answer the "strategic decision" of the United States? Has the bilateral dialogue paved the way for North Korea to abandon its nuclear arsenal in its entirety?

If Prime Minister Shinzo Abe does not think so, he should then ask President Bush to reconsider policy. Otherwise, Japan and the United States will have strategically different dreams in the same bed. Consequently, the hollowing-out of their alliance will be set in motion.

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(5) US district court decides blanket cattle testing is legal:
Government has no authority to place ban; Private company wins case

Shimbun Akahata (Page 15) (Full)
April 18, 2007

Washington, Jiji Press

Creekstone Farms Premium Beef, a US meatpacker in Kansas, filed a complaint against the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) seeking approval for it to independently carry out BSE inspection. In this connection, it was learned on Apr. 16 that the District Court in Washington handed down a ruling in favor of the firm, deciding that it is illegal for the government to ban the firm from independently carrying out BSE inspection. The ruling is noteworthy of attention as paving the way for blanket cattle inspection by private companies.

The ruling will not take effect until June 1 so as to give time for the USDA to respond. The firm has already constructed facilities for blanket cattle inspection. It said that it is ready to cooperate with the USDA. It will decide whether to start testing, once it determines whether the USDA will appeal the ruling.

The ruling handed down in late March noted that the law, which provided the grounds for the USDA decision to place the ban, allows it to regulate the use of medicines by the private sector with the aim of determining whether cattle are infected with diseases or not, but gives no authorization to ban inspection of slaughtered cattle.

Creekstone Farms had demanded government approval for blanket cattle testing from about three years ago, claiming that such a testing will lead to improved confidence in US beef in Japan and South Korea. However, the USDA is keeping the ban on cattle inspection by private companies in place, insisting that cattle testing by the private sector has no scientific grounds and will damage the trustworthiness of BSE testing by the government. The company filed a complaint last March.

It is important for Japan to continue blanket cattle testing

(Commentary) The ruling handed down by the US District Court in Washington noted that it is illegal for the USDA to ban private companies from conducting BSE inspections, overturning the US government's ban on blanket cattle testing by private companies on the grounds that such inspection is not based on scientific grounds.

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The court decision has once again raised the responsibility of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the New Komeito for easing Japan's blanket cattle testing system at the beck and call of the US and forcing through the resumption of US beef imports without blanket testing.

According to foreign telegrams, the court ruling pointed out the efficacy of blanket cattle testing noting that it is useful as a measure to prevent BSE and called on the USDA to authorize such a testing by private companies.

The court decision has brought into the bold the importance of blanket cattle testing as a domestic BSE preventive measure.

(6) Japan, behind in FTA race, urged to craft global strategy

YOMIURI (Page 9) (Excerpts)
April 19, 2007

Japan has reached a broad agreement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to conclude an economic partnership agreement (EPA).

In auto parts, flat-screen TV and other manufacturing industries, a division-of-labor system has been widely adopted between Japan and Southeast Asia. In producing a plasma TVs, there are many cases in which value-added major parts, such as the panel, are made in Japan, the parts are assembled into semi-finished product in Indonesia, and

the semi-finished product is completed in Vietnam. In this case, tariffs are imposed whenever products move from nation to nation. But once an EPA covering the region is concluded, the tariffs will be removed, making it easier for Japanese companies to promote the division of labor in the ASEAN region.

An EPA between Japan and ASEAN is regarded as one step forward toward the concept of an East Asia EPA. Under this concept, 16 countries - Japan, China, South Korea, the 10 ASEAN countries, India, Australia, and New Zealand - would seal an EPA, based on a free trade agreement (FTA).

However, Japan has lagged behind the United States, the European Union (EU), and even South Korea in competition over FTA and EPA. Following South Korea sealing an FTA with Chile in 2004, Japan launched EPA negotiations with Chile.

South Korea has eagerly pushed ahead with negotiations on concluding FTAs with economic powers. It reached a broad agreement on concluding an FTA with the US on April 2 and also plans to hold the first round of FTA negotiations with the EU in May. The EU has levied a 10% tariff on automobiles and a 14% tariff on flat-screen TV, so if the EU and South Korea strike a deal, Japanese products might become less competitive in Europe. In contrast to South Korea, Japan has yet to launch FTA negotiations with the US and the EU. .

China has already put an FTA with ASEAN on goods into effect. China has also engaged in FTA negotiations with such resource-supplying countries as the six Middle East countries belonging to the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) and Australia.

Some observers attribute Japan's delay in the FTA race to an absence of global FTA strategy as a result of giving priority to forming a

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free trade system centered on the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Nobuto Iwata, professor at Aoyama Gakuin University and president at the WTO Research Center, said: "Japan has yet to craft a strategy to seal EPAs with countries other than Southeast Asian countries. South Korea and China have concluded FTAs in succession. Japan needs to take response measures to such moves." Nihon Keidanren (Japan Business Federation) has called for a FTA between Japan and the US, from the viewpoint of strengthening the Japan-US alliance.

Hidejiro Urata, professor at the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Research of Waseda University, commented: "It is desirable for Japan to establish a system to have the Kantei (the Prime Minister's Office) take the lead in determining the nation's external economic strategy while removing the conventional vertically segmented system of government administration." Keidanren has proposed creating a council on external economic strategy, stressing the need for a unified body going beyond the wall of government agencies.

An abolishment of tariffs on rice, wheat and other agricultural products also stand in the way for Japan in promoting EPA negotiations. The Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy set up expert panels on agriculture and EPA. These panels have engaged in discussing what measures should be taken. But some reiterate the need to establish an institute vested with more authority.

SCHIEFFER